

The Ridgeway School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126451
Local Authority	Swindon
Inspection number	328501
Inspection dates	19–20 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Limm HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1380
Sixth form	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P Lay
Headteacher	Mr S J Colledge
Date of previous school inspection	28–29 September 2005
School address	Inverary Road Wroughton Swindon SN4 9DJ
Telephone number	01793 846100
Fax number	01793 815065

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	19–20 November 2008
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Ridgeway School is a large specialist science comprehensive school serving the village of Wroughton and other villages on the outskirts of Swindon as well as parts of Swindon itself. Students come from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds though most are more advantaged. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is low. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than average. Most students are of White British heritage although numbers from various minority ethnic backgrounds are increasing. The number of students for whom English is not the first language is below average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Ridgeway School is providing an outstanding quality of education. There have been a number of changes since the headteacher arrived in 2006 and these have transformed the school. One teacher encapsulated this well when he said, 'Same old buildings but a brand new school.' The school prides itself on maximising individual students' development and achievement and students confirmed that it is succeeding in attaining this objective. Students spoke very appreciatively of their hardworking teachers and the additional support they receive when needed. Parents were supportive but felt the school could do more to keep them aware of, and understand better, all the changes that were being undertaken.

Students are keen to succeed and they work hard in lessons and enjoy the many other activities the school provides to enrich their education. Standards are consistently high in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form and students make excellent progress. Standards are consistently high in Key Stage 4 but the rate of progress that students make is slower than at Key Stage 3. The school recognises that achievement at Key Stage 4 could be higher and has extended its curriculum with a view to improving students' progress. Early indications are that these changes are having a positive impact on students' attainment. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress at Key Stage 3 and excellent progress in Key Stage 4. Teaching and learning are good in the main school with many examples of excellent teaching in Key Stage 3. They are outstanding in the sixth form. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and clearly expect high standards. The personal development of students is excellent and there are many opportunities for them to flourish, ranging from an excellent curriculum and enrichment programme to the many chances for participating in school and community life. The school has benefited enormously from its specialist status in science and the curriculum and outside links have been strengthened as a consequence. The health and safety of all individuals on the school site is paramount for the school and over the past year policies and procedures have been reviewed and changed. Behaviour is managed very well and bullying is rare. The vast majority of students enjoy school and feel well cared for.

The leadership and management of the headteacher and his team are outstanding. In a short space of time they have established a dynamic culture of regular monitoring and evaluation at faculty and department levels which ensures that all staff contribute consistently well to securing high standards and school improvement. School development planning and self-evaluation are excellent and focused rigorously on the key areas for improvement. The governors discharge their responsibilities extremely well and ensure their active support is balanced by highly effective challenge on key issues. The success of the school over the past two years is all the more commendable, given the drawback of aging accommodation and high energy costs. The new buildings will improve this situation. The school has responded extremely well in addressing the issues raised by the previous inspection and its capacity to improve is excellent.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students' achievement in the sixth form is outstanding in both their academic and personal development. A high proportion of students remain in school until the end of their courses. The school operates a flexible admission policy for the sixth form. This means that although most sixth formers embark on their academic courses with good GCSEs, some are admitted who have not attained a full set of good grades at GCSE because the school thinks they would benefit from remaining at school and following one of the new curricular pathways the school has introduced. By the end of Year 13, standards are well above average, with excellent progress resulting from teachers' clear attention to the learning needs of individuals. Outstanding leaders and managers have coordinated changes to all aspects of students' experience by closely monitoring and tracking individual students' progress and matching provision closely to different needs. Successful changes to the curriculum have therefore allowed students at all levels to follow courses which enable them to achieve extremely well. The excellent quality of teaching helps students attain consistently high standards. The school sets challenging targets and ensures these are met or exceeded. Students feel very well supported and take full advantage of a broad range of opportunities to contribute to the school and the wider community. Their personal development benefits greatly from a programme of enrichment that encourages independence of thought and action. Sixth form students are very well cared for and an impressive number go on to good universities to continue their studies.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the changes made to the curriculum improve student progress at Key Stage 4.
- Ensure that parents are more engaged in deliberations about school improvements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall standards over recent years have been consistently well above average throughout the school. Achievement is excellent at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form and good at Key Stage 4. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards attained in English, mathematics and science are significantly above the national average. Although students enter the school with above average attainment they make excellent progress. While many students attain high standards at GCSE, including English and mathematics, their rate of progress, though good, is slower than that achieved at Key Stage 3. Recently, new courses were introduced at Key Stage 4 and these are beginning to enable more students to make better progress. Higher attaining students do well at Key Stage 3 and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well at Key Stage 3 and very well at GCSE. In the sixth form students mainly follow courses leading to A-level qualifications but recently new curriculum provision for those who do not want to follow this route is having a positive impact on their progress and results. Standards are consistently above average and there is a steady trend of improvement in overall points scores.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students feel safe in school and they show respect and consideration for each other and their teachers. In lessons and around the school behaviour is good and students have positive attitudes to learning and to their school. Students enjoy school, especially when their lessons are stimulating and involve them actively in their learning. Exclusions are low and are falling due to highly effective strategies in managing behaviour. Students are developing into active citizens. They take up the many opportunities on offer for them to express their views through subject focus groups and other student voice activities. Most feel listened to and are proud to be able to bring about changes to their school. They work hard to raise money for local, national and international causes and their strong global links with schools in other countries raise their awareness of lifestyles and cultures other than their own. Attendance is above the national average and has improved steadily over the past three years, particularly for persistent absentees. Students are prepared very well for their future lives and the world of work through the high quality guidance they receive on future study, careers and enterprise education. Students' contribution to the community is outstanding with large numbers involved in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. There is very active involvement by many students as community service volunteers and members of the Green Team. Very high participation levels in extra-curricular activities and involvement in the impressive range of food initiatives contribute to students' enjoyment of school and their healthy lifestyles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There are some clear and consistent strengths in teaching and learning, notably in the school's science specialist subjects. Lessons across the school are well planned with clear and achievable learning objectives, so that students understand their purpose and what is expected of them. In many lessons enthusiastic teachers with good subject knowledge fully engage the students with challenging activities delivered at a good pace. Here knowledge and understanding are acquired quickly and lessons are wholly constructive experiences. Many teachers are adept at using resourceful and imaginative methods, especially through the use of interactive whiteboard technology, that encourage in students the skills of collaborative working. Good questioning techniques from many teachers engage students in discussion that helps to further develop their thinking skills.

Most teachers have high expectations of behaviour, and a positive working atmosphere exists across the school. Teachers make good use of assessment information to set challenging learning goals and to monitor progress closely. Students say that they know with confidence what their targets are and how they can improve their work to achieve these in most subjects. However, the quality of the marking of students' work is variable. Where it is good, teachers make it clear how work could be improved and clearly correct any misunderstandings, but sometimes marking is irregular and superficial and this does not move students on in their learning.

The school has embraced teaching and learning initiatives such as 'Learning to Learn' (L2L), assessment for learning, and the development of thinking skills and accelerated learning in a successful and coordinated way. These have made a good impact in lessons. Indeed, older students say that there has been a marked improvement in teaching since the last inspection. As one Year 11 student put it, 'Teachers are pushing us a lot more,' and others have alluded to better planning and greater variety in their lessons. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are outstanding and students make excellent progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum has been carefully remodelled to exploit well the new requirements at Key Stage 3 and to provide clearer links between GCSE and sixth form courses. Gifted and talented students have a wide range of additional out-of-school activities as well as appropriately challenging tasks in lessons. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are currently offered excellent support in developing literacy and numeracy, followed by a strengthened programme of work-related and vocational options in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Provision for personal, social and citizenship education and health and safety is very well organised. Community cohesion is promoted very well across the school. The curriculum in the sixth form meets the aptitudes and needs of students exceptionally well. Science is promoted extremely well and is very popular. There is also an excellent range of clubs and visits out of school. The provision for sporting activities, especially swimming at the school's leisure centre, contributes well to the students' capacity to stay safe and lead healthy lives. The curriculum for the sixth form is outstanding and builds well on the excellent foundations in the main school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care for all students is a key strength of the school. The highly effective mentoring system, together with the excellent liaison between pastoral and academic teams, leads to what students feel is a system which monitors, 'pushes' and supports them to achieve their very best. As a result, students feel well cared for, and they know the standard of their work and what they need to do to improve. Students in all year groups are clear about their targets and they receive additional support where needed. Students are supported by a wide range of internal and external professionals and fellow students, such as those trained as life coaches and peace ambassadors. The school works well with a very wide range of external agencies to provide tailored intervention programmes for vulnerable students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly dyslexic students, currently receive high quality literacy support in small groups. The school offers its students many opportunities to develop into responsible leaders in their community, for example as mentors, prefects and sports leaders. Students speak very highly of the support they receive in their primary schools prior to joining The Ridgeway School, for example the exciting themed days. This has enabled Year 7 students to settle well and enjoy all aspects of their new school. Students receive excellent guidance to prepare them for the next stages of education or training. Child protection procedures are thorough and checks on staff meet government requirements. Race and bullying logs are in place and show that few incidents occur.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school is extremely well led by the headteacher. He is deeply committed to securing excellence in every aspect of the school's work. The senior leadership team plays a significant role in planning and implementing policies and procedures that bring about school improvement. The 'Oversight' system has enabled the team to have a comprehensive view of strengths and weaknesses in the school and where changes are required. Faculty and departmental leaders plan very well and their self-evaluations support the excellent school self-evaluation process most effectively. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. Excellent tracking and monitoring ensure that students attain as well as they do and make outstanding progress. Specialist science status has been led and managed most skilfully. Links with outside agencies and partners are strong and this helps the school to ensure that the quality of its provision for students is excellent. The headteacher is aware that some parents think they have not been sufficiently engaged in discussions about aspects of the change process and has plans to address this. The governing body is highly effective in holding the school to account for changes that are made. It uses its excellent expertise extremely well to ensure that school plans and developments are attainable. It is acutely aware of the need to reduce costs and rationalise expenditure without undermining the quality of school provision. Community cohesion is promoted extremely well and the school is very sensitive to the importance of ensuring that relationships within the school are positive and that each individual thrives.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall	16–19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	1

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	



21 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Ridgeway School, Wroughton, Swindon SN4 9DJ

Thank you for your positive contributions during our visit to your school. We learnt a good deal from talking with you and the staff, and observing some of your lessons and other activities. You spoke openly and confidently and we were impressed by how well you 'know' your school. You helped us to understand just how good the school has become since the last time it was inspected. We agree with you that your school is now excellent and very keen to improve further, with your help and support. Your examination results are impressive. You are taught well and you appreciate your teachers' hard work to enable you to succeed. You have excellent opportunities to study a wide range of subjects and pursue many additional interests such as those provided by the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. The headteacher, his senior team and the governing body all work very hard to secure your safety and make sure you have the best all-round education possible.

We realise that the school has made a large number of changes in a relatively short time and have asked the headteacher to ensure that your parents are more involved in discussions about these in future. We know that you make good progress towards attaining high standards at GCSE, but have asked the school to ensure that you make even quicker progress in Years 10 and 11 so you can attain even higher grades.

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm
Her Majesty's Inspector